

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign

*20 years experience of Community Involvement – Key
Lessons for the next National Drugs Strategy*

12TH NOVEMBER 2015

Criminal Justice vs Health

- “Addicts We Care” – the street campaign
- Negative impact of criminalising drug users – 2012 Policy Document
- Citywide Conference 2013 “Criminalising Addiction – is there another way?”
- The difference between criminalising a drug user and a drug
- Involvement in EU and International networks
- Minister opens up public debate
- Oireachtas Justice Committee Report

Community Drug Projects

- Part of community response in '80s and '90s
- Funding came through with setting up of Task Forces
- Unique model – integrated across service areas, responsive to needs, rooted in community
- Have continued to innovate and respond despite continuous cutbacks
- Need to explain and promote the model
- Day after day after day – day in, day out – it works!

Community Drug Markets

- Street campaigns in '80s, '90s
- Changing nature of drugs trade – increasing levels of violence
- Low-level intimidation in the community
- Serious intimidation of drug users and families
- A silent issue that needs a voice – gathering the information
- FSN/Gardai reporting system
- Need to show change is possible – building on role of community organisations

Young People at Risk

- Second Ministerial Report 1997 – Young People’s Facilities Services Fund(YPF SF)
- Range of services - need to monitor and evaluate effectiveness
- Need to develop integration, not separation
- YPF SF no longer administered as part of Drugs Strategy
- Needs to be back as core part of prevention and harm reduction in NDS

The next “New” Drug...

- There will always be new drugs...
- Heroin, benzos, ecstasy, cocaine, crack cocaine, headshop drugs, weed, tablets, new psychoactive substances...
- Alcohol
- Legal ok/illegal not ok – misuse of legal not ok – illegal use of legal not ok...
- Current approach is reactive, need debate on a better approach
- International evidence?

Inclusion of Alcohol in Drugs Strategy

- Alcohol as an issue for the Community sector
- Significant evidence base
- Numerous reports, policies and recommendations
- 2009 government decision to have an integrated alcohol and drug policy
- 2011 Report of the Advisory Group on Substance Misuse Strategy
- Pieces of legislation have been introduced
- Integrated strategy not in the terms of reference for next NDS

Range of Different Drug Problems

- Different problems in different communities – need for local response and local decisionmaking
- Setting up of LDTFs based on this – communities affected by heroin
- Changing trends – e.g. less heroin use in Dublin / growth of heroin use outside Dublin/ polydrug use/ NPS / alcohol
- Localised need for specific services e.g. safer injecting rooms
- RDTFs developing more localised structures

Centralised Government Systems

- Local response to local need – an innovative partnership model
- Local structures (Task Forces) linked to national structure (NDST)
- Overarching public service system in Ireland is centralised and needs to be changed to support local decisionmaking
- NDS Structures remain in place but role has diminished
- Participation in structures has diminished, interagency partnership is weakened

Interagency Partnership

- First Citywide Policy Document 1996 – Health, Justice and Education
- Last campaign – 17 agencies and departments
- Range of complexity of related issues e.g. mental health, homelessness
- Strong working relationships between individuals
- Response to financial crisis has led to a pull-back from interagency working and more unilateral decisionmaking by departments
- Current national structures not effective in countering this trend

Political priorities/ Political leadership

- Rabbitte Report in 1996
- Junior Ministers since then up to 2014
- Responsibility for additional brief added in 2002
- Minister for Health in 2014
- Campaign for a Junior Minister
- Drugs issue back on public and political agenda
- But how much of a priority?

The Greater Political Challenge?

- Link between drug problems and socio-economic disadvantage
- Acknowledged in 1996, RAPID set up in 2001
- Drugs problem has spread and diversified, but there is still a community drug problem in our most disadvantaged communities
- Impact is on all aspects of community life
- Drugs market as part of the local economy
- Need for alternative economic development
- Link to international experience – across the world, the poorest suffer most from the current situation re drugs

A Voice in International Drugs Policy

- There is no partnership structure to deal with international policy
- Ireland adopts the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan on Drugs
- Ireland participates in UNODC meetings
- EU has common position on UNGASS
- Need to develop a stronger voice, have experience to bring to debate
- Community and voluntary sectors have increasing involvement in EU and international networks

Conclusions

- We have a huge amount of knowledge
- We have a huge amount of experience
- We have a huge amount of commitment
- We have a huge amount of resilience, adaptability and are pro-active
- There is a lot that we don't know and we have the opportunity to learn from other people through international experience
- We are not using or building on all of these resources, so we have a huge amount of frustration
- Can we use them and build on them in developing the next NDS?